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Close U.S.-Israel Relationship Makes Keeping Secrets Hard

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 21 — The relationship between Israel and the United States has become so intimate that many American officials are convinced of Israel's ability, on a routine basis, to obtain sensitive information about this country's secret weapons, advanced technology and internal policy deliberations in Washington.

Israeli diplomats and leaders sometimes react to intelligence reports and policy shifts before they are even complete, the officials say. Israeli procurement officers know the stock numbers and specifications of new and advanced weapons and components that have not even been delivered to United States armed forces, according to a well-placed officer.

For the most part, the close ties have been created deliberately by the United States as a function of the long years of American military, economic and moral support for Israel's survival. And in many respects, the military and intelligence relations resemble those between the United States and such other traditionally friendly nations as Britain, Australia and Canada.

But interviews with dozens of present and former officials with experience in the White House, the Pentagon, the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other agencies also reveal a quiet concern among some over how porous the separation between the Governments has grown.

The latest debates over the relationship have been fostered by the arrest last month of Jonathan Jay Pollard, a civilian analyst for the United States Navy charged with selling classified documents to Israel. The papers reportedly contained intelligence information on Arab countries and Soviet weaponry that the Israelis were not able to get through normal channels.

In addition, Israeli officials say the documents showed that the United States was spying on Israel.

'The Same Techniques'

Many officials believe that there is nothing sinister in the kind of informal ties that exist between some Israelis

and Americans, and that Israeli security benefits United States interests. Some point out that the United States gets intelligence information from Israel, often illicitly as well as formally.

"By using exactly the same techniques in Israel as the Israelis use, we learn as many secrets in Israel as they learn," said a former official. In addition, formal, authorized exchanges have gone on for years.

The officials disagree about the value of such information, however. Some say it has been most useful when Israel has provided captured Soviet-made military equipment, and when it comes from a country such as Iran, where the Israelis continue to have contacts. Israel has also provided information on Pakistan's nuclear weapons development, officials said. But policy makers and intelligence officials have found broad intelligence assessments from Israel biased and, in one official's words, "highly tinged" to advance Israeli policy.

In the Pollard affair, Prime Minister Shimon Peres of Israel issued an apology, returned the documents and produced Israeli officials for questioning by a United States team of investigators that completed its work this week. But the case has focused attention on the Israeli-American relationship and has released some anger long pent up by officials who have resented what they perceive as Israel's strong political influence in Washington.

Israel appears to obtain information on several tracks. One is espionage, reportedly conducted in the United States since the late 1940's. Another involves personal contacts with officials who feel strongly that Israeli interests should be supported. A third is through authorized channels of intelligence-sharing and strategic cooperation, which have been enhanced under the Reagan Administration.

Although many officials welcome the intricacy of the relationship as beneficial to the strategic position of the United States in the Middle East, others worry about the seepage of privileged information to the Israelis. Over the years, these officials have taken silent steps to transfer those under suspicion or to cut them out of Middle East affairs.

"There is one guy — I won't talk if he's in the room," an Administration official said. "I won't say anything."

For other American officials, however, personal friendships with Israelis often seem to help their careers.

"There is a breadth and depth to the relationship that didn't exist five years ago," said one American who works as a pro-Israel lobbyist. "An infrastructure has been built between the two armed forces, the two defense bureaucracies, the political-military types at State. People have careers invested in it. The President wants it, the Secretary of State wants it. That's what makes this town work."

'They Set Up A Pretty Good Network'

Although the Pollard case is the only one to have been prosecuted, it is not the only example of Israeli spying to have come to the attention of law enforcement officials.

"They certainly have operated here before," said Raymond W. Wannal Jr., a former Assistant Director of the F.B.I. who served on the bureau's Middle East desk from 1947 to 1963. "When they first set up their state, they were very efficient. They set up a pretty good network in this country."

After gaining independence in 1948, he said, Israel ran surreptitious operations in the United States with a four-member commission that included an American citizen, two Israeli diplomats and an Israeli troubleshooter who traveled frequently to this country.

The F.B.I. knew of at least a dozen incidents in which American officials transferred classified information to the Israelis, Mr. Wannal said. The Justice Department did not prosecute.

"When the Pollard case broke, the general media and public perception was that this was the first time this had ever happened," said John Davitt, former chief of the Justice Department's internal security section. "No, that's not true at all. The Israeli intelligence service, when I was in the Justice Department, was the second most active in the United States, to the Soviets."

Mr. Davitt, who left the Justice Department in 1960 after 30 years, said most of the Israeli activity was aimed at gathering information on Arab countries. But, he added, "there were instances in which we were targeted."

"They would approach someone in our Government and in our defense industries and seek to obtain classified information," he said.

A C.I.A. Study Finds Israeli Activity

In 1979, the C.I.A. reported in a study that Israeli intelligence agencies were engaged in the "collection of information on secret U.S. policy or decisions, if any, concerning Israel" and "collection of scientific intelligence in the U.S. and other developed countries."

Other officials were also less than astonished by the Pollard case. "I'm not very surprised this happened," said Richard V. Allen, a former national security advisor to President Reagan. "The relationship between the U.S. and Israel has never been so completely candid and deep as to preclude the possibility of this happening."

The Israeli espionage efforts appear to spring from a dual sense of uncertainty about American friendship and dependence on American aid. The aid began in earnest after the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 and reached \$3.75 billion this year. It is the most assistance given to any country by the United States. Yet Israelis often express a conviction that Washington's support has limits, that the United States would not come to Israel's rescue militarily in a war of survival and that, in a crisis, Israel must rely only on itself.

In Mr. Allen's view, the Pollard case was an "aberration" that "went over the boundaries of accepted behavior." But he added: "I have to assume that all friendly or allied nations are on the make for whatever information they can get. The boundary line has to be respected by both sides, and it may not always be explicit."

A Vague Boundary Of Proper Conduct

Indeed, that inexplicit boundary has been a problem for some American officials, especially those with social, business and ideological ties to Israel and Israelis.

One former White House employee with friends in the Israeli military and Government drew the line at documents, saying that conveying information verbally was often the stuff of diplomacy but providing a document was taboo, except through authorized channels of exchange.

"Diplomats and intelligence officers barter information," said a veteran diplomat. "That's the way they get information. That's what the game is all about."

Furthermore, he and others observed, respect for the sanctity of classified information had been eroded by the Government's tendency to classify practically everything. "We know everything is overclassified," the diplomat said. "You have to have an inner rudder to tell you when you've gone beyond the national interest."

Not everyone appears to have such an inner rudder.

A former National Security Council official told of suspected violations by a C.I.A. watch officer in the White House situation room. The man expressed unusual interest in Middle East affairs, the former official said, adding that his co-workers noticed that he came in on weekends, asked about cable traffic regarding the Middle East and looked at materials he had no need to see.

Once, the former official recalled, an Israeli Cabinet minister inquired about a White House policy strategy that had been closely held, and suspicions were raised that the C.I.A. officer had conveyed privileged information.

One day the President was talking on the telephone with a Middle East head of state. As is customary, the official was monitoring the conversation on a speaker phone. The C.I.A. officer hung around, trying to listen, the former official said. Finally, he motioned the C.I.A. man out of the room and closed the door. Then he got the man transferred out of the White House to a non-sensitive job, and what the official called "resonances" from the Israelis about American policy stopped.

In another incident, a small study group was assessing the military balance in the Middle East after the 1973 war. It included officials from the C.I.A., the National Security Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency and

the intelligence and research section of the State Department. As drafts of the report were being prepared, Israeli officials were contacting Americans in the C.I.A., the State Department and the Pentagon to complain about specific sentences and paragraphs, according to a senior official involved. "The drafts were getting to the Israelis as fast as they were getting to the top of the C.I.A.," he recalled.

Although he suspected one official, he did nothing, the senior official said.

Nuclear Material Missing in 1965

In 1965, a small nuclear processing plant in Apollo, Pa., the Nuclear Materials and Equipment Corporation, was unable to account to the Government for 381.6 pounds of highly enriched uranium, enough to serve as raw material for 10 nuclear bombs.

Zalman A. Shapiro, the founder and first president of the firm, repeatedly maintained that the uranium had been lost naturally during processing. But Federal documents showed that the F.B.I. was investigating the possibility that it had been transferred to Israel. The investigation was inconclusive.

A list of the F.B.I. files on Mr. Shapiro, obtained recently, shows reports on his activities from 1949 to 1963 and from 1967 to 1974. One man listed as a contact of Mr. Shapiro was Avraham Hermoni, a former science attaché at the Israeli Embassy in Washington.

On March 9, 1978, Steven D. Bryen, an aide to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, had breakfast with Israeli officials at the Madison Hotel in Washington. Seated nearby was Michael Saba, a former executive director of the National Association of Arab-Americans.

Mr. Saba said in a sworn affidavit that he heard Mr. Bryen tell the Israelis: "I have the Pentagon document on bases, which you are welcome to see."

Mr. Bryen has emphatically denied making such an offer, saying Mr. Saba "heard what he thought he heard because he wanted to hear it" and criticizing investigators for never questioning the Israelis who had been present. A two-year investigation by F.B.I. agents, which looked into the possibility of espionage charges, failed to find proof that Mr. Bryen had passed classified information to the Israelis. The case was dropped with the approval of senior Justice Department officials.

'Unanswered Questions' But No Conclusions

According to Justice Department documents recently released under a Freedom of Information lawsuit by the National Association of Arab-Americans, the agents did conclude that Mr. Bryen had a close relationship with Zvi Rafiah, who was responsible for Congressional liaison at the Israeli Embassy. Mr. Bryen called that relationship

"all aboveboard and proper," and said, "I got a lot of information off him for the committee."

A Justice Department memorandum reviewing the case, written in December 1981, said:

"Although there are a number of unanswered questions regarding Mr. Bryen's relationship with officials of the Israeli Government, and in particular his efforts to obtain sensitive information for which he had no apparent legitimate need but which would have been of inestimable value to the Israelis, it appeared that the Department exhausted all leads and that additional investigations would not resolve these questions."

Mr. Davitt, then chief of the Justice Department's internal security section, said the prosecutors handling the case wanted to bring it before a grand jury. The suggestion was rejected by Philip B. Heymann, who headed the Justice Department's criminal division at the time. Mr. Davitt called it an "honest difference of opinion."

In the Reagan Administration, Mr. Bryen became a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense overseeing transfers of technology to foreign countries.

Mr. Davitt said he disagreed with the decision to award Mr. Bryen a top-secret security clearance, which was recommended by the Defense Department's Security Division.

"I find it difficult to understand how anyone reading the file could conclude, 'Well, this matter was investigated and he was given a clean bill of health and all the allegations were resolved in his favor,'" Mr. Davitt said. He explained that even without sufficient evidence to prosecute an individual, a security clearance could reasonably be denied.

"When you're looking at an individual who will have access to sensitive information," Mr. Davitt said, "you should sin on the side of being overly cautious."

"I think he's wrong," Mr. Bryen countered. "I believe in justice in the old-fashioned sense. Either you're guilty of something or you're innocent. There is no reason I should not have a clearance. This kind of guilt by suspicion is an outrage."

Continued

The Complexities Of Ties and Friendships

The example of Mr. Bryen illustrates the complexities of friendships and associations entered by some officials who support Israel. In his financial disclosure statement filed when he took office in 1981, Mr. Bryen listed his most recent major source of income as the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby that has a staff of 82 and a national membership of 51,000 in 435 Congressional districts.

In addition, Mr. Bryen's wife Shoshana directs the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, a group of prominent Americans "committed to explaining the link between U.S. national security and Israel's security,

and assessing what we can and must do to strengthen both," in the words of the institute's newsletter.

Officials and former officials describe a schizophrenic attitude toward Israel in the United States Government, one that has transcended administrations. On the one hand, they say, Israel and its American supporters have considerable political influence. On the other hand, that influence antagonizes the middle-level military officers, intelligence officials and civilians who represent the bureaucracy's long institutional memory.

A former Pentagon official described a scene he said was typical: An Israeli colonel, a military attaché, has a Pentagon pass, as do attachés from other friendly countries. He goes into an intelligence office at night and asks the captain or major on duty for some special, urgent information. When the junior officer hesitates, saying such data is not included in the general guidelines of material to be released, the Israeli colonel presses, hinting that he may have to call his ambassador. The American, caught between two risks, may decide either way, the official explained, but he nurtures a smoldering resentment.

The military's annoyance at Israel has other roots as well, including remaining anger over the Israeli sinking of the U.S.S. Liberty, an American spy ship in the Mediterranean during the 1967 war. Thirty-four men were lost in what Israel maintains was an accident.

Israel's continuing ability to get military equipment right off the assembly lines, even when it is needed by United States forces, has also generated resentment. One American officer recalled dealing with one of the Israelis involved in the Pollard case — Yosef Yagor, who was listed as a science attaché but was known to the American as a procurement officer based in the Israeli Consulate in New York. "He had the exact numbers of sophisticated types of weapons that nobody was supposed to know existed," the officer said. The Israeli requests are routinely denied by the military, he added, only to be granted at the higher political levels of the Defense Department.

A Danger Seen Of Anti-Jewish Feeling

Some officials see a danger that anti-Jewish sentiment lurks behind an effort to plug leaks to the Israelis. Although some Jewish officials feel comfortable dealing with the Middle East, other Jewish and some non-Jewish officials say they believe Jews who work on Middle East affairs exist under a cloud, the objects of a vague and unjust suspicion.

"I think there's probably some truth to that," said Richard N. Perle, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy and a strong friend of Israel. "I don't work on Middle East affairs, and I'm happy I don't."